

**Testimony of Ingrid Gillespie
Director of Prevention, Liberation Programs Inc
Member of MATCH Coalition**

In Regards to

**H.B. No. 6659 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING
JUNE 30, 2025 AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

Dear Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ingrid Gillespie and I am the Director of Prevention at Liberation Programs Inc, a large behavioral health organization in Fairfield County providing prevention, treatment and recovery services. I am also a member of MATCH (Mobilize Against Tobacco for Connecticut's Health), a coalition of over 50 members dedicated to help eliminate smoking and smoking related illness in Connecticut. I have had the opportunity to engage in tobacco prevention and smoking cessation efforts in a variety of capacities since 2005 including teaching youth and parents about the risks of smoking and vaping, facilitating a Smoking Cessation Supports Initiative for those living with serious mental illness and those with substance use disorders (SUDs) and previous advocacy efforts to fund the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to share comments on H.B. No. 6659 (COMM) An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 And Making Appropriations Therefor, which proposes deep cuts to life-saving tobacco-related prevention programs over the next 2 years.

The proposed cuts are disturbing because they seem designed to sacrifice long-term benefits for the sake of short-term fiscal goals. Consistent funding to support prevention and cessation efforts is essential to reduce the long-term impact of tobacco and related products on the health and economic well-being of people in our state. The long-term health effects of tobacco use are well established, and the long-term health effects of e-cigarette use are only now beginning to emerge (e.g., blood vessel damage, increased cardiovascular risk; source, NIH, 2022). Direct smoking-related healthcare costs in CT are more than \$2 billion annually and smoking related loss of productivity add another \$1.25 billion per year (TruthInitiative.org). The long-term costs of vaping are as yet unknown. Furthermore, the addictive nature of nicotine and the vulnerability of youth to addiction are well recognized by the industry, which spends \$9.1 billion each year to market their products in the US (American Cancer Society, 2022), including more than \$60 million in CT in 2023 (TobaccoFreeKids.org). Approximately 90% of smokers began by age 18 years and teens underestimate the addictive potential. Although e-cigarettes are frequently characterized as smoking cessation aids, those who vape are more likely to move onto cigarettes (Yale Medicine). Once addiction has been established, cessation is a difficult process. Addiction is a chronic disease requiring treatment resources (NIDA). Smokers may attempt to quit 8 to 11 times before succeeding (CDC). Despite these substantial effects on the health and economics of people in CT, the state has consistently fallen short of CDC minimum recommended level of funding of \$22.7 million annually for programs to address tobacco use. In the past, that has been defended based on a need to reduce budget deficits. Given that we currently enjoy a substantial budget surplus, there could be no better time to increase the level of annual funding to address this important public health issue.

In summary, I am hopeful that this bill will be amended to increase rather than decrease the designated resources for the biennium. It stands to reason that the effectiveness of measures to address the effects of tobacco products is related to the level of investment of resources. For that reason, I strongly urge you to consider the increasing funding for prevention and cessation of tobacco use and thereby assure adequate resources to address this important public health issue.

Thank you for your consideration,
Ingrid Gillespie